

## Friendship: The ordinary and extraordinary

In my closet hangs a purple tweed jacket. I do not wear it very often, my body having changed shape since the sunny summer day on which it was bought. But it suits my spirit as well as any garment could. No amount of rigorous cleaning out of my closet can convince me to part with it.

The jacket was purchased on a "let's get lost" adventure with Carol. Carol and I first met in university, spent endless hours in the theater designing and creating costumes, and then lost contact when she abruptly moved back to Maine. We found each other two years later when I moved to Pennsylvania close to where she was living with her new husband. At least once a month she would drive over to take me back to Allentown, Pa., for the weekend. We had learned through experience that putting the two of us together in a car with our non-stop conversation was detrimental to our shared shaky sense of direction. So we gave ourselves up to the inevitable and enjoyed the revelry of discovering new places. The jacket was bought on one such trip.

I do not remember who saw the jacket first. I thought it was nice, but was not really planning on buying anything. Carol thought it was wonderful, that it looked great on me and would be a "versatile coordinating" addition to my wardrobe. I took her advice. A few months later as I packed to spend eight months on the road with the MCC drama group, it became the centerpiece around which I chose the other articles of clothing. It went with everything from casual to business to semi-formal. I never tired of wearing that jacket.

Several years later as I numbly packed a suitcase to fly from Winnipeg to Pennsylvania for Carol's funeral, I again chose

that jacket as the centerpiece for my wardrobe. I remember thinking that I could not bear to wear black to the funeral of someone whose life had been so full of color. The subtle shades of purple seemed a good choice. It was not until I was at the funeral home and someone commented on my "lovely" jacket that I remembered it had been Carol's idea to buy it. As I stood beside her casket trying to find a way to let go, I talked to her about that day and the jacket.

Carol taught me much of what I know about friendship. Those lessons seem woven into the fibres of the jacket. Friendship fills my life with color and texture. It often comes unexpected and unplanned. Found on a seemingly ordinary summer day, its warmth and style surrounds me in the darkest and coldest moments. It is a centrepiece that grounds me as the events and directions of my life change—"appropriate for all occasions." And sometimes it is so comfortable that I take it for granted until someone or something reminds me of its value.

Compiling this issue has given me the time and opportunity to reflect on friendship in a way not taken since Carol's death four years ago. Initially I had envisioned a collection of joyful stories to celebrate women's friendship—short reflections giving glimpses into our everyday lives and the relationships that help us to be who we are. What I discovered was a hesitation, even within myself, to expose these stories to public view. The everyday stories about our friendships are considered "not really very interesting" to anyone else or considered too private to share. There is something sacred about friendship.

It becomes easier to tell our stories once the friendships have been lost or changed. I don't think I once told the story about my jacket until Carol's death. I have found myself, in the last few weeks, looking at the everyday events of my friendships with new eyes, remembering them with more clarity, knowing that these ordinary moments are the foundation upon which these friendships have been built and are strengthened.



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My thanks to those who agreed to share their stories of both the ordinary and extraordinary moments of friendship. In addition to the stories are three pieces on the meaning of friendship from two very different perspectives, the impressions of two young girls and the research of a psychology professor.

The last piece presents us with an opportunity to formally acknowledge the friendships of our lives. Unfortunately, we often see them as a support to us in our experiences rather than as an important focus in and of themselves. We acknowledge most major rites of passage and relationship ties (birth, marriage, death, etc.) through established ceremonies. Whatever "rituals" of friendship we may have, we clothe in the language of tradition or habit. To give an example, every year at the Winnipeg Folk Festival several of my friends and I pose for an annual picture. The composition and combination of people have changed over the years, but the core remains the same. Is this a tradition? Or is this a ritual of renewal, an acknowledgement and record that no matter what else happens in our lives during the rest of the year, we will come together on this one weekend to relax in each other's company, to share the music we all love, eat a common meal and exchange the stories of the day. This July we discovered that the yearly picture would have to be taken on two different days to record all of us. Only then did I realize that this practice holds for me a deeper meaning than "tradition" conveys.

This issue of *Report* does not end with its last page. The celebration continues with your own stories, traditions and rituals. I encourage you to give voice to these sacred moments—write them down in a journal or letter. Remember them, tell them, pass them on friend to friend and in larger circles. Enjoy the texture and warmth of your friendships. May you revel in the comfortable everyday events and the unexpected "let's get lost" adventures.

**Kathleen Hull** lives in Winnipeg and shuffles papers and books in the Communication Education Department of MCC Canada. She is a fiber artist, writer, performer/director and a religion student with an interest in psychology. And she gratefully finds friends to share her eclectic life in all these places.

by **Kerry Fast and Bonnie Loewen**

## Both of us . . .

Both of us know that if we had met each other 10 years ago we would not have become good friends. We would not have understood each other; Bonnie, the outspoken, over-confident performer type, and Kerry, the self-conscious introvert type, would have had no appreciation for each other's personalities. We are friends in part because our life experiences have made us into women who are compatible. Our friendship is not made up of only the four years that we have known each other. It consists of the 30 some years that we have lived, and the events and people that have made us who we are. In the respect we have for our personal histories, our friendship has a depth that makes our interaction with food, cows and words meaningful and challenging.

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**KERRY:** We both grew up in Mennonite homes where the producing, making and eating of food was central to family life. That history has nourished our friendship. It is a history filled with women who had different choices and resources than either of us have; women whose choices were not to study or to travel extensively, but whose choices revolved around their families, households and communities. Our world is different from theirs, but with them we share important choices about quality of life and what kind of women we will chose to be. In my own way I have chosen to respect and honour those women by using my creativity in ways that they would have been able to use theirs. Bonnie shares my respect and gratitude for the gifts the women in our history have given us. Not only have our lives come together as a gift to me, but Bonnie has given me the opportunity to honour and connect with our history in a meaningful way. When, in a given day, we make 30 peach pies or 50 spanokopitas for our freezers, it's not just Bonnie and I who are present, but the spirits of the women of our history who hover over us in a cloud of witnesses. I consider the kitchen we work in to be sacred. It does not belong only to us and our projects but also to those women who have taught us our skills and passed on their creativity to us. The same Spirit who moved in their lives continues to find creative expression in ours. I do not want to romanticize the past, but I do want to remain aware of it and the extent to which it has made me who I am. Bonnie and I see our friendship as being in some



**"Bonnie and I see our friendship as being in some way a part of that history."**

way a part of that history. That history has made it possible for us to be friends and to participate together in activities that strengthen our friendship.

**BONNIE:** We've picked, sorted, squashed, boiled, sweetened, thickened and canned chokecherries. We've bought, blanched, peeled and sliced peaches; measured, mixed and rolled shells for peach pies. We've also had vareniki afternoons, ravioli expeditions and spanokopita mornings. Conversations of grandmothers, theology and herbs move alongside the rhythm of our work. Our practical, efficient production of food is complimented by Kerry's love for beauty and authenticity in food preparation and most times, my welcome reception of this attention. One evening she prepared a Middle Eastern dinner. The table was pushed aside and an Indian rug rolled out. She invited me and a number of other friends to pistachio yoghurt chicken, fresh hot pita bread wrapped in a cotton cloth, stuffed eggplant and herbed rice wrapped in grape leaves with a cream sauce. At the end of the meal she knelt beside each one of us to wash our hands with rose water and then served us cardamon coffee in small glass cups. Our work and enjoyment with food has brought out the basics in our friendship—to delight in the practical, to be curious for the authentic and to be nurtured by the beautiful.



**BONNIE:** On weekends Kerry takes milk from our refrigerator, and my family waits in anticipation for the English muffins, French bread or cinnamon buns that will come back to our counter top before the weekend is over—all because Kerry and I own a Jersey cow named Abigail.

I live on a farm with my family where we have pasture and a barn for livestock. Kerry, who studies and works part time, enjoys baking bread. We decided she would pay for her share of Abigail and the feed by baking bread for our family.

The annoyances which comes along with co-ownership challenge Kerry and me to a nitty gritty honesty: such as times when I leave the wooden milking stool out in the rain or when Kerry forgets to water the cow.

Perhaps the most important part of owning a cow together is that I'm not alone in a kind of work that is perceived by the wider community (and the three dairy farmers in my neighbourhood) as "unnecessary" work. It is understood by both of us as important work. We are learning the discipline of caring for an animal and the therapy of milking. We are appreciating the fruits of our labour found in cottage cheese, butter, yoghurt and lots of thick Jersey cream.

**KERRY:** Owning a cow together with Bonnie provides many opportunities to spend time with her. Baking bread for Bonnie and her family on a regular basis also allows me to spend a few hours every week or every other week, measuring flour, kneading dough and shaping loaves. It is inevitable that during that time I will be reminded of Bonnie and our friendship. A few weeks ago when I brought over bread, Bonnie's daughter expressed disappointment that it wasn't cinnamon rolls. Last week when I was baking rye bread, I remembered that I had promised Kyra that I would bring cinnamon rolls. Our friendship is not insulated from other people and events. Bonnie's family, my studies, Bonnie's participation on the board of the local women's shelter, my herb garden and our other friendships are integral parts of our friendship. Our friendship is strengthened as we share our lives with each other. If the time comes when our ways part and we no longer live within close proximity of each other, I will have received too much of Bonnie and shared too much of myself to let our friendship end.



**BONNIE:** The pain and joy of our friendship is intricately dependent on our mutual love for words. Our joy with words comes through in our relationships with the children in our lives. Kerry tells me of children's literature and has a good supply in her own library. The other day we went to her house for tea. While I changed my baby's diaper, Kerry read A.A. Milne's poetry to my five-year-old daughter, Kyra.

Our pain with words is often found in our common church experience. We are both from Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC) congregations, where words are often used to justify the stifling of our gifts as women who interact with the Bible and are able to communicate this knowledge. We talk, cry and shout our anger and hurt with each other. However, we rarely stop here. Having studied theology and experienced the reality of God's grace, we find places in our faith history that give us words to define our life by strength, wisdom and compassion. And so we find ways to communicate our love for the Word.

We have worked together with others in the establishment of a house church in our community. The spiritual nurture I receive from the care Kerry gives to liturgy and the support I receive for my own worship leading is vital to my involvement in this beginning spiritual community. Within this context, we are challenged by our very different personalities. I need a discerning wisdom as to the timing and content of my spoken contributions, while Kerry, on the

**"Baking bread, milking Abigail and talking to Kyra remind me that words are a part of being, and that friendship is in being."**

other hand, needs more courage to speak the wisdom she already holds. We have had painful times where I have said too much and she too little. With honesty our differences have created a healthy tension which is, most times, building our characters.

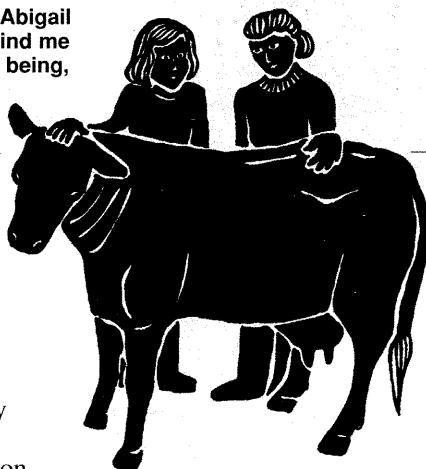
**KERRY:** Words are important to both of us. I don't think we would be friends if it wasn't for words. There are things we enjoy doing together, but such activities are always surrounded with words. We may be making pies together but that leads us to discuss *Babette's Feast*. We may be discussing my latest quilt project, but that leads us to discuss the rich heritage of women in our history. We may be eating cheese cake at an outdoor cafe on Corydon, but that leads us to discuss the state of our society.

Take, for example, our visit to a local antique store. We talked about antiques, whether a table we both liked was walnut, and the beauty of a hand embroidered doily. But the conversation could just as easily have turned to Karl Barth, the profundity of *The Stone Diaries*, or how to write a sermon. As we explore new areas of commonalities through our conversation, our friendship grows.

Because I am a person to whom ideas are very important, I sometimes allow myself to believe that words are all that there are to friendship, or at least, that they are the most important part. I allow myself to think that our activities together as friends are only the vehicle for our words. Baking bread, milking Abigail and talking to Kyra remind me that words are a part of being, and that friendship is in being.

**Bonnie Loewen has studied in Toronto and Winnipeg and has a Masters of Divinity from the University of Winnipeg. She is currently studying creative writing, is mother and wife in a family of four people and is involved in the leadership of a house church.**

**Kerry Fast is working towards a Masters in New Testament Studies at the University of Manitoba. She works in the Middle East Department of MCC, is the ninth of 10 children and is involved in the leadership of a house church.**



**"Friends meet needs in our lives that may not be fulfilled by other kinds of relationships."**

by Beverley Fehr

## **"For a time the world becomes a different place . . ."**

*The importance of friendship in our lives*

Friendships are clearly a part of our lives, but just how significant are they? Frequently, when people are asked what is most important in their lives, they mention marriage or family relationships. Friendships might appear lower on the list. If, however, one studies what is actually going on in people's lives, quite a different picture emerges. In short, it appears that friendships mean much more to people than they realize or at least are prepared to admit.

For example, in a fascinating study of the role of friendships in day-to-day life, researchers at the University of Chicago asked nearly 300 people to carry electronic pagers with them for a week (Larson & Bradney, 1988). The participants in this research were teenagers and adults from Chicago and retired Canadians from the Kitchener-Waterloo area. Once during every two hours of their waking day, these individuals were paged and asked to report their mood, their thoughts, what they were doing, and who, if anyone, was with them. It turned out that the presence of friends was strongly associated with pleasure; people of all ages reported more enjoyment and excitement when they were with friends than when they were alone or with family. The married participants were even happier being with friends than when they were alone with their spouse. These adults' happiest times, however, were when they and their spouse were together with friends. These and other findings led the authors to conclude that: "With friends our attention becomes focused, distractions lessen, awareness of time disappears. We emerge into a world in which the intimacy and joy shared with others is the fundamental reality, and for a time the world becomes a different place (Larson & Bradney, 1988, p. 124).

The results of this study are consistent with other research showing that friends are a primary source of meaning, happiness and joy in people's lives. In my own research on

**"In contrast, women's friendships are based on talking. Even when engaging in an activity with a friend, for women of all ages talk remains central."**

love, I find that for young adults, friendship love is seen as capturing the meaning of love—more so than most other kinds of love, including romantic love. Thus, the findings from these disparate areas of research converge on a single theme, namely that friendships are of great significance in people's lives.

Why are friendships valued so highly? One answer is that friends meet needs in our lives that may not be fulfilled by other kinds of relationships. For example, friends meet our material needs. They provide a variety of kinds of help and support such as babysitting, lending tools and bringing us soup when we're sick. Friends also meet our *cognitive* needs. They provide stimulation in the form of shared experiences and activities, as well as through the lively exchange of gossip and ideas. In addition, friends provide a frame of reference through which we can interpret the world and find meaning in our experiences. Finally, friends meet our *social-emotional* needs through the provision of love and esteem.

Interestingly, women and men tend to differ in the emphasis they place on each of these functions of friendship. Men's friendships are generally activity-based. In other words, men enjoy doing things with their male friends such as observing or participating in sports. Men also focus on the practical, concrete help they receive from friends as a benefit of friendship.

In contrast, women's friendships are based on talking. Even when engaging in an activity with a friend, for women of all ages talk remains central. In fact, the sharing of thoughts and feelings about personal and relational issues is what women treasure most in their friendships with other women. Studies that have been conducted with adolescents and women in their 20s through to women in their 70s and 80s show that at all ages, intimate self-disclosure is a highly-valued aspect of close friendships. Intimate talking is considered more important than concrete help or doing activities together. As Johnson and Aries (1983) observe, "Through extensive talk about the most routine of daily activities to the most private of personal problems and crises, women friends establish connections with one another that function significantly in their lives" (p. 358).

Talk with friends is cherished because of the openness and acceptance that is experienced in those interactions. It is common for women to report that they are more likely to feel judged or compelled to meet certain expectations when talking with family members. They believe that friends are

more likely to listen without judging or being critical. Thus, it is not surprising that women reap many benefits through talk with friends. One such benefit is self-clarification. We come to know ourselves through the process of revealing our thoughts and feelings to a supportive, caring listener. Women also experience enhanced feelings of self-worth as a result of talk with friends. Friends are often perceived as giving validity to aspects of one's self that could not be shared with others. Finally, talk with friends also has interpersonal benefits. It is not uncommon for women to describe situations in which talk with a close female friend was helpful in resolving difficulties in their marital or familial relationships. Thus, it seems clear that for women, talk with friends has salutary effects on both their personal and relational well being. Given these benefits of friendship, it seems fitting to conclude with Ralph Waldo Emerson's proclamation that "A friend may well be reckoned as the masterpiece of nature."

**Beverley Fehr, Ph.D., is an associate professor of psychology at the University of Winnipeg. She has just published a book titled, *Friendship Processes*, Sage Publishers, Newbury Park, Calif.**

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by Linda E. Witmer

## Forever friends

A casual friendship began between Debbie and I while we were studying nursing at Eastern Mennonite University. It was a surprise to both of us when Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) approached us one year following graduation about working in Guatemala together. As we talked about the possibility, excitement grew. This was the beginning of 10 years of service with EMM/MCC working with the K'ekchi' indigenous group as community health workers and educators.

Living and working together, in a fairly remote area with few other North Americans, we became best friends with a strong commitment to empower and encourage one another. I remember people questioning us—Who was the leader? Who was the follower? These questions made us determined to keep our relationship mutual, each of us leading in our areas of strengths and following in our areas of weakness. Although competition did arise between us, we worked hard at building each other up and affirming each other in our areas of giftedness. We were blessed with very different gifts and complemented each other in our work as a team.

Struggles arose when Debbie could speak both K'ekchi' and Spanish better than I could. She is a caring person, intelligent, organized, perceptive, a great writer and can make the most difficult topic simple to understand. In these areas I felt inferior, yet never felt put down for my struggles with language or my limitations. She encouraged me and helped me to remember that language is not everything when relating to people; that I am a caring person, a good hiker, taker of risks, can drive a four-wheel drive jeep through the mud with ease, have art skills and creative teaching ideas. She always emphasized my strengths and I tried to do the same for her. We helped each other bloom and grow through our affirmation and support for one another.

We enjoyed planning and working together to initiate a community health program. Developing a curriculum for training village health workers is hard work, but very rewarding. Together we wrote and illustrated a health manual. Debbie wrote scripts for health lessons in K'ekchi' and Spanish, while I drew the series of pictures to go along with the lessons. Seeing the K'ekchi' health workers grow in self-esteem and serve their communities was fulfilling to both of us.

**"Although competition did arise between us, we worked hard at building each other up and affirming each other in our areas of giftedness."**

One of the most important parts of our friendship was time taken alone for meditation, journaling and prayer. Retreat times were priorities for our spiritual growth. Often we would spend time sharing our learning and praying together.

Fun times were important. Vacations and trips to Guatemala City were planned with enthusiasm. One sport we both liked was swimming. There was always a reason for celebration in our home and entertaining guests was a shared activity which we both enjoyed.

There were testing times in our friendship. When Debbie started dating someone, I felt rejected. It felt threatening to our friendship and our service together. At times we hurt each other with our actions and words, but worked hard at communicating our feelings and frustrations. We said we would give each other a six-month notice before either of us would marry. This would give us a time to make the necessary adjustments and process the changes that would come in our own friendship.

After 10 years in Guatemala, we returned to the United States, each locating near our families. Communication by phone was frequent and trips back and forth between Virginia and Pennsylvania were much needed as we sought to develop new skills and grew in the areas in which we had earlier depended on each other.

Our lives have gone in different directions. Debbie is married and has two children. Her husband, Dave, has become my very good friend. After three years of service in Ethiopia, they now live in Virginia. I have returned to Guatemala in an administrative role. Letters continue back and forth between Virginia and Guatemala. We share our joys and struggles, though we are not as intimately involved in each others lives as in the past. I feel blessed, affirmed and supported by both Dave and Debbie. They are "forever friends," a gift I will always cherish.

**Linda E. Witmer served in Guatemala among the K'ekchi' people for 14 years under EMM/MCC. She is presently the EMM country representative for Guatemala, a nurse educator and church administrator. She is also adjunct faculty at Goshen College.**

by Mary J. Dyck and Dianna Yoder

## Mentoring relationships

Being a mentor or having a mentee means having a friend to do things with or for.

Being a mentee or having a mentor means knowing someone's always there.

Being a mentee is celebrating my 13th birthday at Jumer's.

Being a mentor is teaching Dianna how to use silverware at Jumer's.

Being a mentor is taking a whole day off from work to go to Brookfield Zoo.

Being a mentee is planning the day at the zoo so that the next activity is always at the other side of the zoo.

Being a mentee is enjoying a picnic lunch at the zoo.

Being a mentor is watching Dianna eat one piece of string cheese all the way from Chicago to Meadows.

Being a mentor means helping Dianna get ready for the prom.

Being a mentee means smiling for the pictures.

Being a mentee is working hard to earn the money to take Mary for Christmas dinner at Jumer's.

Being a mentor is feeling special at being asked out for dinner.

Being a mentor means bringing home toiletries from fancy hotels.

Being a mentee means having small bottles of shampoo and conditioners to take on trips.

Being a mentor means introducing Dianna to Marge, the florist.

Being a mentee means being amazed and fascinated by the art of flower arranging.

Being a mentor means being available to talk.

Being a mentee means having someone to talk with about relationships, school, family or just anything.

Mary J. Dyck lives in Goodfield, Ill., and is trained as a nurse with a specialty in gerontology. Dianna Yoder lives in Normal, Ill., and is a junior in high school. They attend the Mennonite Church of Normal where they have been paired as mentor and mentee since Diana was in seventh grade. "Mentoring Relationships" was written for a mother/daughter banquet in Spring 1994.

inside the drugstore  
outside to the corner  
of the wall  
you and i giggle  
anticipate this  
offering  
this breaking of the  
popsicle  
in its blue and white wrapper  
i crack its core  
against the brick corner  
raise it up  
for inspection  
for the fairness of the break  
you choose first  
your half  
maybe slightly bigger  
my friend  
this is our communion  
romping with purple tinged  
tongues  
all the way home

—by Diane Driedger

Diane Driedger is a Winnipeg poet, writer and co-editor of Moonprint Press. This poem first appeared in her book, *Darkness is a Marshmallow*, Moonprint Press, PO Box 293, Winnipeg, MB, R3C 2G9.

**"Friends are nice but they don't agree with everything you say."**

**"Friends are people who like you, even though you have your faults."**

by Amanda Reimer

## Friends

A friend is someone you can count on. I've had friends I thought were real friends but now they hardly ever speak to me. Friends are nice but they don't agree with everything you say. Friends are human; they're not perfect. You fight sometimes but you always make-up. If you fight with a friend and they don't even attempt to make-up with you, it's not a real friend. It's hard to have a friendship with only one person trying. A friend should at least understand what you say. A friend should try to comfort you if you're sad and be happy with you when you are happy. Sometimes a friend is mean to you but there are times that make up for that. It shouldn't matter if you have more than one friend. If you have more than one best friend you all should try to get along. If you break up with a friend and you have to find a new friend, that's tough but don't get discouraged and give up!

**Amanda Reimer lives in Winnipeg with her parents and sister Angela. She is 10 years old and in Grade 5.**



by Angela Reimer

## Friends

Whenever you meet someone who is later going to become your friend, you can always tell. At first you don't know what to say and there is an uncomfortable silence, but then you both laugh and suddenly you're friends.

Sometimes the littlest thing can make people friends. When I was five and I was new in the neighbourhood, I met a girl in the street and asked her if she would like to come and play in my kiddie pool. She said yes, and after that one time we played together, she was one of my best friends.

Friends are people who always try to understand you. Even if you don't share their opinion about something, they don't call you weird; they just change the subject so you don't get into a fight.

**Friends are people who like you, even though you have your faults. They try to overlook your bad parts and just look for the good in you.**

If you get into a fight with a friend, they don't wait for you to start making up. If they really cared about you, they should be brave enough to face up and apologize.

Real friends don't get bored with you. Some people I know are best friends with one person one month, then the next month they're best friends with someone else who they thought seemed more interesting.

All in all, a friend is someone you can laugh with, have fun with and do just about anything with. And no matter what you say or do, they'll always be there for you.

**Angela Reimer lives in Winnipeg with her parents and sister Amanda. She is 12 years old and in Grade 7.**



by June Mears

## God, you are like a girlfriend . . .

God, you are like a girlfriend to me. A "girlfriend" like an African-American woman who says in a two-toned voice—"Giiirrlfriend!" while facing me with her hands on her hips and her head moving ever-so-slightly from side to side.

You are no longer the big white silent male god who resembles the Lincoln Memorial. No longer do I stand at your feet and barely whisper my dependent requests like a scared little girl.

You are a wise woman who talks with me, who is vitally interested in me and my life. You expect me to relate to you as an adult, not a dependent child. You want me to be me when I am with you—and you will not hesitate to let me know if I am not being my truest self with you.

You sit on the back porch with me exchanging stories, dispensing wisdom and sharing a good laugh.

You are loving and direct, confronting and warm. You are my girlfriend.

**June Mears lives in Elkhart Ind., and is currently studying Christian spirituality at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary.**

by Kathryn Loewen

## My friend Heather

I watched as Heather greeted Sarah, my year and a half old child. It was one of those "Kodak" moments—the times you file in your memory as treasured. As Heather helped Sarah from her coat, she lifted her up and gave her a big hug and a kiss. How grateful I was to have a friend who cared so much for not only me, but also for all of my children. Later that same afternoon, after a good time visiting, "coffeeing" and stripping wallpaper, I raced out quickly to try and get home before my other children—it was a cold day and the house was locked. However, as I climbed into the van, I almost got out again. I had this feeling that I had not said a proper goodbye to my friend, nor told her how much I had enjoyed "stripping" together. I had appreciated our afternoon. That's okay I thought, we'll be talking soon.

For both of us the next week was busy and although I thought of her as she moved through her variety of activities that week, we never seemed to catch each other at home. It was unusual for us not to talk, but the time passed quickly. Then a phone call from a mutual friend. Had I heard . . .

Heather had felt sick at their church's spirituality conference, gone home and then collapsed. She was rushed to the hospital with what we later found out to be an aneurism. She was put on life support systems. Sadly, she was taken off of them the next day.

My friend is dead. How can I let her go?

Heather, I'm sure, never knew she was dying. For that I thank God. She didn't need to worry about leaving her two sons, her husband, family and a multitude of friends. Heather had touched the lives of many people. She was active in many things, her church and the community.

How could I continue to live in this new community without her? She was so much a part of my everyday life. Other people have begun to fill some of the things that she did for and with me, but I still feel an emptiness. I know that I will



find it hard to invest so much of myself in one person again. It has hurt so much! And yet the joy of our relationship was worth the pain of it ending.

Heather involved herself in my life soon after my family and I moved to Brandon. A week after we arrived my son Andrew was invited to her son's birthday party. Shortly after that, Heather invited me over and from then on she made sure to include me in Brandon life. We "clicked" and became good friends. Our children played together, we shared meals, family celebrations, our love of recipe books, cooking, gardening, reading, a thirst for learning theology, the frustrations and joys of parenting, and just being an encouragement to one another. We became confidants. It was nice to have someone to share joys and sorrows.

I am grateful for all the things that Heather and I have shared. But I am also angry for the loss of a best friend and all the things we planned to do together that will not be—for walks through our gardens, exchanging plants and recipes and books, attending a conference on spirituality together, studying French, sharing our kids' school news, babysitting back and forth, "coffeeing", talking, sharing and supporting one another.

It's so nice when you do not have to explain yourself, but can just "be." I could be that with Heather and she understood and often knew what I needed before I did. She once gave me a book called "A Gift of Encouragement." That's what she was for me at a time when I struggled with balancing four children, a husband, a new home, myself and a move to a new city. She was a place to anchor.

I'm sorry that we shared such a short time in our lives, but I'm glad that our lives were able to touch. I am glad that we took time to tell each other how much we loved and appreciated the other. When she died I knew that there was nothing unfinished between us. How good it feels to not have things left unsaid. Still, I miss her every day.

The day that Heather was taken to the hospital I lit a candle and watched it burn. I somehow felt that it offered her some hope for life. I did not want to blow out the candle for I knew that with the flame going out, it meant the end of her life and our relationship. How I clung to that tiny light of hope, that perhaps through all odds she would pull through. Yet the doctors offered no hope. There was a chance to use some of her organs for someone else, but soon even that hope of her life continuing to give was taken away.

Heather died Sunday morning as the spring was coming. At the funeral we celebrated her life with the music she enjoyed, including the Hallelujah Chorus. She was buried on a warm sunny day, in the country, under a tree where the birds continue the music and songs she loved so much.

Her body lies in a quiet and peaceful place now. I pass it often on my way to and from town and sometimes stop for a quick reminiscence. She was a special person, who graced the lives of many people. She loved, she laughed, and she shared herself in whatever way she could. She challenged many with her faith, her quest to learn more about herself, her God, her children, her relationships. She was a moving, doing presence, who knew the importance for time with her family and time for herself. I have learned a lot from Heather and will always carry her with me.

**Kathryn Loewen** lives in Brandon with her husband Russell and four children ages 2-10 years. When she is not managing and coordinating her family she is involved in Jubilee Mennonite in Brandon, enjoys gardening, and working with clay, making, among other things, coffee mugs for her friends. Heather Pilloud died Sunday, March 5, 1995.

**"In our mobile society, we make friends, leave them, make new ones and find ourselves bereft of ceremonies by which to remember and mark the importance of our love and affection for one another."**

by Marlene Kropf

## Rituals that celebrate friendship

It was the last day of school in spring. Instead of riding the school bus, my friend and I took the long way home. We walked through the streets of our little town, crossed the railroad tracks, lingered along the river, and came at last to the bottom of the hill where I lived just beyond the edge of town. Grade school was over. Now we would go our separate ways—she to the town high school and I to a Mennonite high school 30 miles away. Though the distance would have seemed insignificant to adults, the miles stretched on forever to two young adolescents. We knew our paths were separating and that we would rarely meet again.

With the instincts of children, we created an impromptu ritual. Beside the river we held each other's hands, pledged our undying friendship and sang the only parting song we knew, "Bless'd be the tie that binds." Our voices quivered, especially on stanza four, when we sang: "When we asunder part, it gives us inward pain; but we shall still be joined in heart and hope to meet again."

Danni was not my first friend nor last. She was one of a number of extraordinary people whose lives have met mine, enriched me beyond measure and given me the treasure of true affection.

Though we have cultural and religious rituals for many important milestones in life—birthdays, wedding anniversaries, graduations, retirement—we have fewer rituals for marking the stages and transitions of friendship. In our mobile society, we make friends, leave them, make new ones and find ourselves bereft of ceremonies by which to remember and mark the importance of our love and affection for one another.

When our family moved from Oregon to Indiana a decade ago, I left behind a warm and wonderful circle of friends. Among them was Claudia—a bright jewel who still shines vividly in my memory. At our first meeting I wasn't really sure whether I would like this woman—she seemed a bit impertinent, more straightforward than I was accustomed. A few weeks later when she came to my home for the first time, she walked into the living room, looked around and exclaimed, "Oh, this carpet is my favourite shade of blue!" My heart perked up because I had spent months and months searching for this particular carpet at a time when only green, gold, brown and orange floor coverings could be found. If she loved this shade of blue too, then I wanted to know her better.

On such a slim basis began a friendship which changed both our lives. Years later when our family faced this major move, I knew that one of the severest casualties would be my friendship with Claudia. How do two people who have seen each other several times a week, listened to each other's hearts, read poetry, hiked together on mountain trails and at the seaside, shared innumerable meals, gone to see plays and movies, met weekly to share their journals, prayed together, sung together, drunk endless cups of tea, even cleaned each other's houses—how do they separate?

We took photographs, ate the last meal, gave gifts and promised to telephone every month for a year. Still I wish there could have been more. The following design for a ritual celebrating friendship is one I wish we might have done together. Such a ritual need not be limited to times of



separation; it could also be happily enjoyed at an anniversary or at some other important milestone in the friendship.

#### **The ritual**

**Setting:** This ritual might take place around a coffee table in a living room, in a dining room, or outdoors at a picnic table. On the table is a tea set, two unlit candles in candlesticks, flowers, a small clear glass container with scented oil, and copies of the prayer, song and scriptures.

The ritual begins with sharing cups of tea or a festive drink. While sipping the drink, the two friends remember the stories of their friendship—where they met, first impressions, how they got acquainted, what caused their friendship to grow and what special experiences they recall.

As the stories come to an end, they each light a candle, signifying the light received in their friendship. They may want to share words of appreciation for the gift of friendship.

#### **Prayer and scripture**

One of the friends (or both) might lead in an extemporaneous prayer of thanks for the joy of friendship, or the following prayer might be offered:

Blessed are you, God

Source of all life and love:

We give thanks for the joy of friendship —

for small delights and large,

a listening heart,

words of comfort,

laughter and tears,

loyalty and truth,

surprises,

predictability,

many reminders of your grace.

Thank you for bringing us together

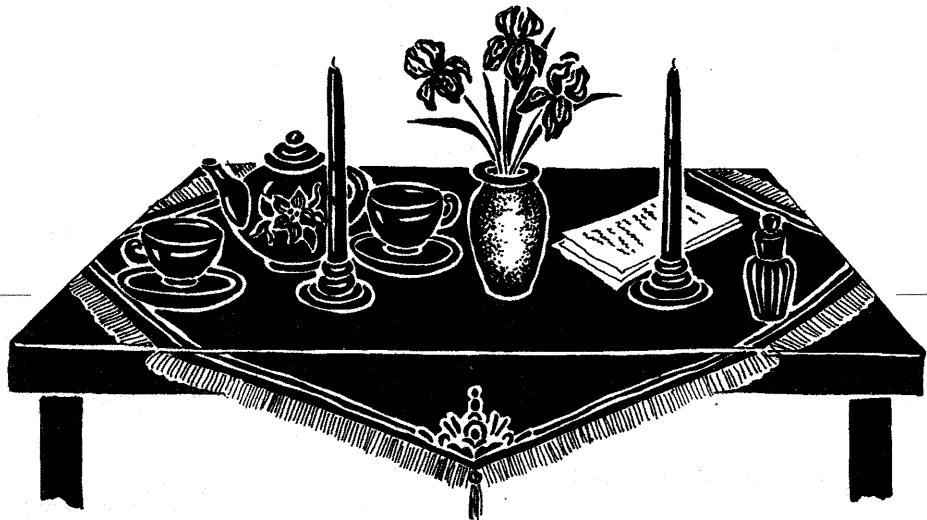
and showing us yourself in one another.

Bless us and keep us

for the honor of your name. AMEN

The following texts may be read and followed by moments of silence.

- Ecclesiasticus 8:14 (Apocrypha): A faithful friend is a sure shelter, whoever finds one has found a rare treasure.
- Ruth 1:8-17
- John 15:12-13



#### **Blessing: Anointing with oil**

As a symbol of blessing, each friend anoints the other with oil. One friend holds out her hands, palms up, and the other marks the sign of the cross with scented oil in each palm. A blessing is spoken, such as: "(Friend's name), may the Spirit of Christ bless you with peace; may God keep you in the hollow of her hand." Then the other friend repeats the ritual.

#### **Pledge of commitment**

If this ritual precedes a separation, the friends may want to speak about how they will nurture their friendship across the miles. If it marks an anniversary or other milestone, they may want to talk about ways they will continue to show their love and respect for one another.

The ritual is concluded by singing the song, "Will you let me be your servant" (*Hymnal: A Worship Book*, #307). On stanza three, the friends exchange lit candles and hold them aloft, returning them to the candlesticks at the end of the stanza. If they choose, they may embrace at the end of the song.

#### **Shared meal**

A simple, festive meal is shared to celebrate the memories of the past and the promises of the future.

*Note:* This ritual may be freely adapted. It could be used not only by two people but a circle of friends.

**Marlene Kropf** works as minister of Worship and Spirituality at Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries, Elkhart, Ind., and is also adjunct faculty at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. She is married to Stanley E. Kropf and is the mother of two young adults.

## A look at the spiritual journey of older adults

***Border Crossing: A Spiritual Journey*** by Katie Funk Wiebe  
(Herald Press, Scottdale, Pa., 1995)

This book is very much an inspiration for the journey into the new experience/expressions of aging. A line of poetry comes to me again and again: "I'm sure I shall not pass this way again." So it is important to do it right this first time.

Wouldn't it be dandy to have a course in preparation for the life changes of aging, before one is thrust into it? This book shares so many important ideas, it is at once just such a course on aging, and the source for stimulating positive responses to the changes ahead.

It was with great pleasure that I read and reread the Preface. There I felt the writer taking my hand and saying, "Come on; we can make this together." She aptly demonstrates how to dignify the discomforts we might be feeling. We see how to squelch the fears that could obsess us.

*Border Crossing* is an encouragement for the reader. It soothes those of us who find ourselves standing in the middle of a dilemma, wondering if there is a way out. It lightens the path we are walking. As we move forward into new places, it tells us—you are not alone. This road is occupied by many pilgrims who are finding answers with assurance. Join the crowd.

*Border Crossing* reminds us that at no stage in life do we have a reason to stop and feel we have finished our journey. This means accepting our circumstances with understanding. It means avoiding expressions of defeat: "I hate growing old" or "I can't do anything anymore. I'm good for nothing."

Wiebe shows us some important responses to accompany our travels into older-person limitations. She notes that the struggle related to social role makes it necessary to know ourselves. She encourages us to keep our minds stimulated with interests outside ourselves, to laugh a little every day, and to walk out and see God's smile in the face of the sun as it slips out at the horizon.

As we read we pause often and ask, "Just where am I?" We can go out into the day with honesty and look our world in the face with the assurance that God knows just where we will need to walk today.

This book is for everyone. Middle-aged persons need it for preparation and older folks need it for joyous progress. Read and rejoice.

**Reviewed by Margaret H. Breneman, Landis Homes Retirement Community, Lititz, Pa.**

## Letters

I recently had the opportunity to read the Report while volunteering at Global Village Gifts. It is fabulous! The articles and testimonies by and for women are compassionate, interesting and fulfilling. So congratulations to all for a job well done. And a "thank you" as well. I can relate in a lot of instances to what is contained and set free in your newsletters—which is something I've had difficulty with while reading other "womyn's" magazines, etc.

—Melissa A. White, *Calgary, Alta.*

I think your latest issue, on "community," was one of the most profound and courageous ever. Among Anabaptist in hostile contexts, the union of faith community and extended family has conceived and nurtured a powerful myth of a supportive community. Like any myth, it contains both truth and illusion.

Ask the men who, as mere boys, joined the army in the second world war. Some of their churches supported them with prayer and parcels. Others excommunicated the dissidents.

Ask the women who exposed sexual sin in the leadership. Often they were disbelieved, shunned, blamed, expelled. The "community" acted like the rest of the world; it first denied and then blamed.

I have often been amazed at the price ethnic Mennonite women were expected to pay, and were willing to pay, to avoid upsetting "the community" or "bringing shame on the community."

They don't ask "What kind of a community is it that pressures some members to suppress truth in order to preserve the reputations of others?" They don't tell the truth: the community, or members thereof, brought the shame on themselves. Women participate instead in a sin against the Holy Spirit, calling good something that has become evil.

We all long for the communion known in the godhead and in Eden, but it is a goal to strive for, never a reality to be protected by lies or suppressed truth.

Your issue reminds us never to ask anyone else to pay to maintain the appearance of community when striving for the reality has become too hard a struggle for the fellowship to continue.

In Christ,

—Donna Stewart, *Killarney Park Mennonite Brethren Church, Vancouver, B.C.*

## Upcoming themes

Following are themes scheduled for issues of the *Women's Concerns Report* in 1996 and the beginning of 1997. We welcome suggestions for contributors for these issues:

- Mid-life
- Worship, celebration and healing
- Mothers and sons
- Women's favorite books
- Infertility
- Voices of young adult women
- Eating disorders
- Race, gender and class

#### **Editor's note:**

The articles on pages 15-18 focus on the Non-governmental (NGO) Forum on Women, August 30 to September 8, preceding the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in

Beijing, China, September 4 to 15. The writers are women working in Asia with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) or China Educational Exchange (CEE).

**"Being there was like sitting down to a generous meal, full plate after full plate."**

by Betsy Headrick McCrae

## **NGO forum on women: A view from China**

Controversies and conflicts swirled around the some 24,000 women and men gathered in Huairou, China, for the NGO Forum on Women. Misunderstandings and misinterpretations abounded. And, as the press gleefully reported, organizational nightmares were plentiful.

But the view from the ground offered a much more varied panorama. Being there was like sitting down to a generous meal, full plate after full plate. Some specialties were spicy, yes, and sour or bitter at times, often unfamiliar, but oh, so satisfying with new tastes lingering on the tongue.

As a Mennonite I was greatly encouraged by peacemakers' stories, such as the Sudanese women who shared how they work to resolve conflict in their war-torn country. I was drawn into inter-religious conversations as women of many faiths discussed how to live together with people who believe differently.

These are issues North American Mennonites and MCC have worked with for many years. Perhaps if another gathering such as this one occurs, we could share our practical experiences with Christian Peacemaker Teams, Victim Offender Reconciliation Programs and other peace ministries.

Any attempt to stereotype the kind of woman who participated in this gathering would fall short of the mark. To walk the forum grounds was to be part of a moving sea of color and diversity—all shades of skin and hair color; all shapes and sizes of bodies wearing dazzling national costumes from all over the world; all imaginable kinds of posters, banners, buttons and T-shirts emblazoned with slogans and images. There were daring young women with closely shaved heads and pierced eyebrows. There were Catholic and Buddhist nuns in habits and robes and Islamic women dressed in black from head to toe. There were representatives from Focus on the Family, National Association of Evangelicals and other U.S. Christian groups.

Forum discussion topics were also diverse, defying generalization. While the larger plenary meetings explored several subjects in depth, the hundreds of workshops offered each day confronted participants with a mind-boggling array of choices. Voices spoke on behalf of women whose children did not have enough food to eat or water to drink. Voices spoke on behalf of girls who are pulled out of school at an early age to marry or to work. Voices spoke on behalf of young women and children being bought and sold for sexual exploitation. Voices spoke out against religious oppression. Voices spoke out about the freedom that comes through their faith. So much to hear. So much pain to feel. So much work to do.

There was much encouragement, too, and reason for hope. A Swedish Lutheran minister told how she preaches that compassion means



**"To walk the forum grounds  
was to be part of a moving  
sea of color and diversity—"**

**"Is it the real issues that  
are being reported or the  
sensational?"**

opening doors to immigrants. A Maori grandmother from New Zealand reminded us we are responsible for cherishing and strengthening our communities.

Zambian community development workers described their success in changing the unfavorable depiction of women in the media and in school textbooks. A Pakistani Islamic theologian challenged fundamentalist oppression of women within Islam while still holding fast to the life-giving aspects of her faith. Young women of many nationalities said to their elders, "When you are tired, when you are ready to lay down your burden, just look over your shoulder and see that we are there."

Whatever difficulties there may have been, this large and sometimes controversial gathering did provide, as its theme promised, a fascinating look at the world through women's eyes. It provided, for 10 days, a sense of the possibilities of international cooperation and community. It provided a safe place for small supportive exchanges and large creative international networking. It provided a tremendous opportunity for cultural exchange and exposure to different ways of thinking. In a world seeking wholeness within diversity, of people yearning to learn how to live peacefully together, it felt right. We are entwined in each other's lives. It was a privilege to be there.

**Betsy Headrick McCrae of Cheraw, Colo., and her husband Bruce are MCC's Vietnam co-representatives. Betsy traveled to China with a delegation of some 140 Vietnamese women to attend the Nongovernmental (NGO) Forum on Women. She is a member of Faith Mennonite Church in Minneapolis, Minn. She is also affiliated with a small French-Spanish Mennonite Church in Brussels, Belgium.**



by Dennette Alwine

## **Two sides to every story**

One hallmark of a democracy is that (theoretically) a variety of viewpoints is heard. But as I poured over a stack of August 30 to September 8 *New York Times*, I had to wonder if the event reported on (the NGO Forum) was the same one I had attended. Certainly, the scope of this conference was immense, and what I experienced in no way represents the whole. But neither do media reports that largely mention poor facilities, Chinese surveillance, demonstrations and Hillary Clinton. There are (at least) two sides to every story, and all of them deserve to be reported, then analyzed by readers and viewers themselves.

Here is what one Mennonite participant observed of one camera crew at the NGO Forum on Women. A presentation was given by members of the group Catholics for a Free Choice. Afterwards, a number of audience members stood up to respond. One woman vehemently shouted her disagreement with the Vatican's position on birth control. A second woman spoke calmly about how she had traveled to Beijing with a group of Catholics among whom there was disagreement regarding reproductive issues. The group had decided, however, to try to find a common ground by meeting together for breakfast every morning at the forum. The camera crew filmed the first woman, but turned the cameras off for the second.

What perspective did this camera crew package for its viewers? As we take in the news and commentary about the NGO Forum, we should be asking ourselves some hard questions—Whose perspective is not represented? What information is left out? Is it the real issues that are being reported or the sensational? Do the pictures presented represent stereotypes or real people?

From my perspective, as a Christian woman residing in China, some disturbing images were portrayed in news reports about the forum. First was a blanket assumption that any form of Chinese security here was harsh and unnecessary. Second was the portrayal of forum participants as anti-family. While it cannot be denied that there were examples to confirm these views, there was also another side. SIDE ONE. A Voice of America radio broadcast stated that exiled Tibetans who spoke out



“... many were moved to tears, realizing how universal lack of self-esteem is for women.”

in one session were heckled by some Chinese participants in the room and then forcibly removed by Chinese police. SIDE TWO. Two women who attended the same session, both of whom understood the Chinese language interactions that transpired, reported that several exiled Tibetans took the floor of a session that was, in fact, scheduled to be led by a Tibetan group from China. The Chinese Tibetans complained vociferously when they were unable to take their rightful leadership. A female, Chinese police officer took the hands of the exiled Tibetans and led them out of the room.

SIDE ONE. The contents of a letter written by James Dobson stated that the women's conference is “The greatest threat to the family in my lifetime.” SIDE TWO. It was a fact that sessions labeled specifically with the words “motherhood” and “family life” were few. But every workshop that spoke to domestic violence, poverty and education (which were many) cut at the root of problems that threaten families. Families that harm each other physically, who don't have enough money to support themselves because mothers face job discrimination, and whose daughters will suffer the same fate later because they fail to become educated—these are all family issues.

Among the forum crowds, it wasn't uncommon to see mothers and daughters, even fathers and sons, who attended together. In one session I attended, a Somali woman proudly introduced her infant daughter to the audience saying, “This is the newest member of our conflict resolution organization!” In another workshop male participant, Ben Zeman, helped one group look at the question, “How can men support women's rights?” As if to answer that question, young women of the world, leading the forum's closing ceremony, called several times for partnership between men and women in the struggle for equality.

Not all women see separation from marriage or motherhood as the answer to equality. Their voices also have a right to be heard. All of us should hold the media responsible for helping us to hear them clearly.

**Dennette Alwine from Carlisle, Pa., has been a CEE teacher in China for five years. She and her husband, Todd Friesen, are In-China Program Coordinators for CEE.**

## Singing from the heart

Four Mennonite women sang with more than 100 women from around the world at the NGO Forum on Women near Beijing. The four were Betsy Headrick McCrae of MCC Vietnam, and three CEE teachers in China—Margaret Metzler, Jeanette Hanson and Dennette Alwine. This was organized by the Anchorage-based One World One People International Women's Choir; participants shared four hours of practice and a final performance of songs for peace and freedom.

During rehearsals, women learned to sing songs using a method common to African-American churches—learning by listening and responding without written music. Because not all of the choir members spoke English, leaders and participants were also challenged to teach, direct and encourage each other through translation and nonverbal communication. In addition to learning style and language differences, participants contended further with rainy weather—sometimes finding rehearsals canceled and rescheduled, other times practicing under umbrellas on an outdoor stage.

None of these challenges dampened the enthusiasm of the participants. They continued to sing “May There Always Be Sunshine” (a Russian children's song) at the request of a Russian film crew amid a pouring rain.

“Singing in this choir was truly a highlight of my experience at the conference,” said CEEer Dennette Alwine. “Half the time I sang with my heart in my throat. It was incredibly moving to feel the power of our voices singing together for an end to war.” When choir director Shirley Mae Springer Staten suggested the group sing the song “How Could Anyone Ever Tell You That You're Anything Less Than Beautiful” for themselves and their mothers, many were moved to tears, realizing how universal lack of self-esteem is for women. Jeanette Hanson, CEE teacher in Sichuan Province, noted that this experience was an equalizer. There was no talk of differences. Words were passionately agreed on and sung from the heart.

—CEE press release

**"She stressed that respect is needed toward other cultures and faiths if faith is to be a force for healing."**

by Margaret Metzler

## **Voices of pain, voices of hope**

For 10 days, the entire world existed in microcosm at the NGO Forum on Women. During those days, the physical distance between nations was bridged as women, living as next-door neighbors, created a place for sharing their experiences.

Some of the experiences shared were of deep pain—women who have been sexually abused in their families, forced to serve as comfort women in past wars, or marketed as wives in the trafficking of women that has become an international trade. Some women spoke out about how hunger and poverty plague their countries in the South, while neighbors to the North grow rich at their expense. Still others marched silently for the return of loved ones taken as hostages or shouted loudly for an end to military proliferation.

Among the thousands of workshops presented during the forum, there were a significant number that focused on personal and global healing. In a playback theater, one international troupe used psychodrama to process the deep emotions of forum participants. Sweet Honey in the Rock, an African-American a cappella singing group, conducted musical workshops and concerts to give voice to pain and hope. In another workshop, women from the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia, Kosova) and the horn of Africa (Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea) met to share their various efforts toward conflict resolution in their regions.

Some of these workshops promoted inter-faith dialogue on healing. One, entitled Women and Religion, was especially thought-provoking. "In spite of losing everything, I am going to choose life," was the most hopeful message heard at this conference, noted one speaker. Life is more powerful than death; love is stronger than evil.

Sister Teresa Chu, formerly with the Canada-China Program and now retired in Shanghai, called on women and men to share in the birthing and nurturing of their families. She emphasized the need for faith as the basis of our values, and cited China as an example where fine values were taught to one generation but disappeared overnight when a new

generation matured. If the faith vision is not caught by youth, she stated, the values will also fade.

Chu called for a de-emphasis of hierarchy and a relinquishment of power. Hierarchies are based on power: does the women's movement represent old power structures or new ones? One participant said that as members of various faiths, we do have a oneness in recognizing a power greater than ourselves.

Other voices pointed out that religious fanaticism often leads to terrorism, that more people are killed in religious conflicts than any other, and that women and children are most often the victims.

A Ghanaian minister faulted missionaries for teaching children to look down on their family and culture. At school we were one thing and at home another, she said. We didn't go to church, but we were notoriously religious in our homes. Our own religion is family-oriented, and our ancestors were kings and queens, but we were taught by missionaries that these things were worthless. She stressed that respect is needed toward other cultures and faiths if faith is to be a force for healing.

A Korean Catholic sister said that a culture of death prevails, but a culture of life must take over. But whether a quiet forgiveness or an active holy rage is the best path to that end was a point of contention.

Several Swedish women called for praying with open hands and hearts, asking God to take away what we no longer need and put in what is needed. There is a God who loves us and cares about our situation, they said.

Summing up, a Roman Catholic sister from Spain, speaking through an interpreter, said: "Each of us wants to put forth our ideas as truth, but there is only one truth. Can we listen to others without feeling threatened?"

**Margaret Metzler lives in Luoyang, China, where she teaches with CEE. She and her husband, Everett, have been with CEE for nine years and are sponsored by Mennonite Board of Missions.**

#### Women in ministry

**Norma Peters Duerksen** was ordained July 16 at Oak Grove Mennonite Church in Smithville, Ohio.

**Dorothy Nickel Friesen** was installed as pastor at First Mennonite Church in Bluffton, Ohio, June 11.

**Helen Kruger** was ordained for chaplaincy ministry on April 2 at Osler (Sask.) Mennonite Church.

**Donita Wiebe-Neufeld** is new youth minister for the Conference of Mennonites in Alberta.

**Bev Redekop** has resigned after four years as co-associate pastor at Peace Mennonite Church in Richmond, B.C. She plans to pursue further studies.

## News and verbs

- Copies of the script of "From Crescent to Circle: A Survivor's Liturgy for Worship, Grief and Hope," which was performed at Wichita '95, are available for \$3.50 (postage included) from MBCM, Box 1245, Elkhart, IN 46515. This one-hour liturgy is built around scripture, song and conversation between five women and provides a window into the healing journey of survivors of sexual abuse. It was written by Linda Nafziger-Meiser and was previously performed in the Goshen/Elkhart, Ind., area.
- Susan Yoder Gingerich of Iowa City, Iowa, was installed in August as new **president of WMSC** (Women's Missionary and Service Commission). Joy Yoder Hess of Goshen, Ind., was installed as president-elect.

- Cincinnati Mennonite Fellowship will host the third biennial **Mennonite Arts Weekend** Feb. 2 to 4, 1996. The theme will be "The body in Art and Spirituality." For information on events and featured artists contact Bob Wells, 513-281-0793, or Chris Schumacher, 513-351-8785.
- The Pikes Peak Arts Council presented its award of excellence to **First Strike Theatre** "for years of bringing the theatre of political satire to Colorado Springs, and for bringing the gifts of irreverence, originality, humor and passion to many venues." First Strike Theatre was founded and is directed by Mary Sprunger-Froese, a Mennonite woman from Colorado Springs.
- The MCC U.S. Peace Education program has compiled a list of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ **military veterans** who are available to conferences and congregations for peace education. Women veterans who are willing to share their stories and faith journeys toward peace are invited to send their names and addresses to

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Titus Peachey, Peace and Justice Ministries, Box 500, Akron, PA 17501. Names will be included on the veterans list, which is available upon request. Respondents will receive occasional mailings of particular interest to military veterans.

- Goshen (Ind.) College is seeking **applicants for campus minister**, to begin August 1996, and for **director of early childhood education**, to begin July 1996. For information contact Goshen College, Goshen IN 46526; fax 219-535-7660.
- Marlene Epp is instructor of a new course in "Mennonite History: A Social History of the Mennonites" at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ont.

WOMEN'S CONCERN REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committees on Women's Concerns. We believe that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committees strive to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures through which women and men can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committees on Women's Concerns.

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- Ruth Toews Heinrichs has been appointed budget and finance vice-president at **Fresno Pacific College**.
- Diane Kinser Born of Lawrence, Kan., is new director of finance and production for **Faith and Life Press**, the publisher for General Conference Mennonite Church.

## **Anabaptist Women Doing Theology**

The third "Women Doing Theology" conference will be May 9-11, 1996, in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The conference theme is "Wind and Fire: Moving the Life Among Us." For a conference brochure contact Wendy Kroeker or Kathleen Hull at MCC Canada, phone 204-261-6381, fax 204-269-9875.

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